

Factors Influencing Occurrence, Scale, Mobility, Runout, and Morphology of Mass Movements on the Continental Slope

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Thrust Category: Marine Geotechnics

LONG-TERM GOALS

Achieve an improved understanding of the relationships between sedimentation, environment, and the morphology of continental slopes. This goal will be accomplished primarily through investigations within the northern California (Eel River) and New Jersey study areas and incorporation of data from around the World. An underlying assumption of our work is that the occurrence and morphology of mass movement features on the continental slope depend upon a combination of characteristics, each of which varies over the region in a consistent manner. The various components of this project are part of a concerted effort between the geotechnical groups at the USGS and Laval University. Their activities are very much interwoven but, for administrative reasons, their respective budgets are identified separately, as are the annual reports.

OBJECTIVES

Identify factors that can be mapped regionally and that determine where and how slope failures occur; derive a basis for producing regional maps that indicate relative landslide susceptibility. Model shear strength development with depth and incorporate this model into continental slope stability, post-failure behavior, and bedform processes. Observe and model pore pressure development in continental slopes. Analyze the relationship between seismic intensity, sediment instability and slope processes.

APPROACH

Our research focuses on the factors that lead to variations in the sedimentological and environmental conditions determining slope failure. We develop improved correlation between engineering classifications and strength factors. We relate compressibility, physico-chemical properties and strength to sediment microstructure, observed using SEM techniques. We simulate sediment accumulation in specially designed large cells. We measure sediment rheological properties in a viscometer. Geotechnical properties are related to sediment density state, obtained from detailed logs of downcore variability of sediment density and sound velocity. Using available bathymetry, we construct slope maps. Seismic shaking variations are evaluated probabilistically by seismologists. *In situ* pore pressures are determined by means of the Excalibur probe (AGC-Atlantic). These pressures can be generated if the sedimentation rate is particularly rapid, if there is charging by bubble-phase gas, or if earthquake shaking disrupts the sediment fabric and causes it to collapse with a resulting increase in the pressure of interstitial fluids. Driving stresses are balanced against strength variations in a geographic Information System (GIS) to obtain a regional estimate of relative slope stability.

Key individuals, at Laval: Jacques Locat, Jean-Marie Konrad, Serge Leroueil, and Priscilla Desgagnés: strength and compressibility measurements, SEM studies, rheology measurements, and simulation of sediment accumulation.; at the USGS: Homa Lee, Kevin Orzech, Dianne Minasian, and Pete Dartnell: physical property logs of sediment cores and relations between geotechnical and classification properties, algorithms relating sediment properties, environmental factors, and slope stability within the framework of a GIS.

WORK COMPLETED

During FY 00, our research involved the two main areas of STRATAFORM: Eel river margin and New Jersey Margin. For the Eel River Margin, we continued the laboratory testing and analysis of tests carried out on various cores obtained from the 1999 Marion Dufresne cruise on the New Jersey Margin. Further tests conducted at Laval included oedometer tests, SEDCON tests, Atterberg's limits, grain size, mineralogy, microstructure and rheology. É. Boulanger completed the initial work on seismic strengthening of Eel river margin sediments by carrying out a total of 25 cyclic shear tests on reconstituted samples (Boulanger 1999). Most of these data are entered into a GIS to evaluate regional variations in sediment properties and environmental loads. Algorithms convert these data into estimates of slope stability. During FY 00, our efforts were concentrated on laboratory analyses. A total of 3 long cores were collected (MD992-211, 212, and 213), of which one is kept at Laval and is to be shared with the USGS group for various geotechnical tests. All cores were logged, onboard the ship, at 1-cm resolution for density, sound velocity, and magnetic susceptibility. In addition, core MD992-213 was completely logged with a CATSCAN at a resolution of 1cm. P. Desgagnés participated in laboratory testing at Lamont Doherty Laboratories on core MD992-211 mostly to carry out strength tests (Desgagnés, 1999, 2000; Desgagnés et al., 2000a). In addition, many members of the STRATAFORM group joined our efforts in illustrating the use of multibeam surveys for the study of submarine landslide features in many parts of the World (Locat et al., 1999). In carrying out the above mentioned work, we participated, in addition to the annual meeting in San Francisco, in a Slope Group meeting at Duke University (Durham).

RESULTS

Classic slope failure features on the Eel Margin are rare even though our methodology shows a high vulnerability to slope failure during seismic loading, indicating either that mass wasting on the Eel Margin takes unexpected forms or that mass wasting is less significant than would be expected. Studies of shear strength development show a bi-linear function, resulting from bioturbation. Rheological studies of Eel Margin sediment show a highly thixotropic material, represented by a pseudo-Bingham model. Analyses of reconstituted specimens of the Eel River Sediments reveals that, following drained cyclic loading, the undrained shear strength increases significantly. Although these conclusions are derived from tests on re-constituted sediments, we can now formulate a working hypothesis: seismic strengthening is a significant mechanism for explaining the paucity of shallow landslide features in the Eel River Margin area. The preliminary results of Marion Dufresne cores indicate that the sediments are normally consolidated (see Figure 1). The strength and water content profiles suggest that there is a stratigraphic change at a depth between 15 and 20 m which could correspond to the base of failure or slide plane. The use of the CATSCAN profiling, in addition to the use of the MST profiler, provides an excellent evaluation of core quality (Figure 2). It also illustrates the need to maintain the core in a horizontal position if we need to know at which depth a void was created during sampling.

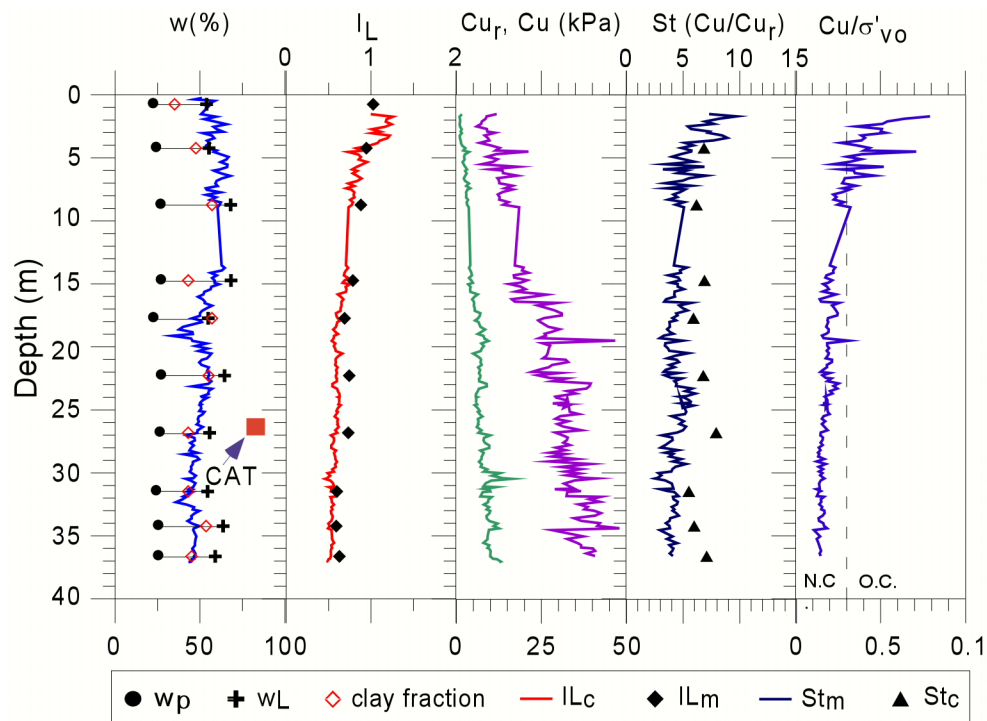


Figure 1. Geotechnical profile of Marion Dufresne core 9922-12 along the New Jersey Margin (CAT: section of CATSCAN image shown in Fig. 2)

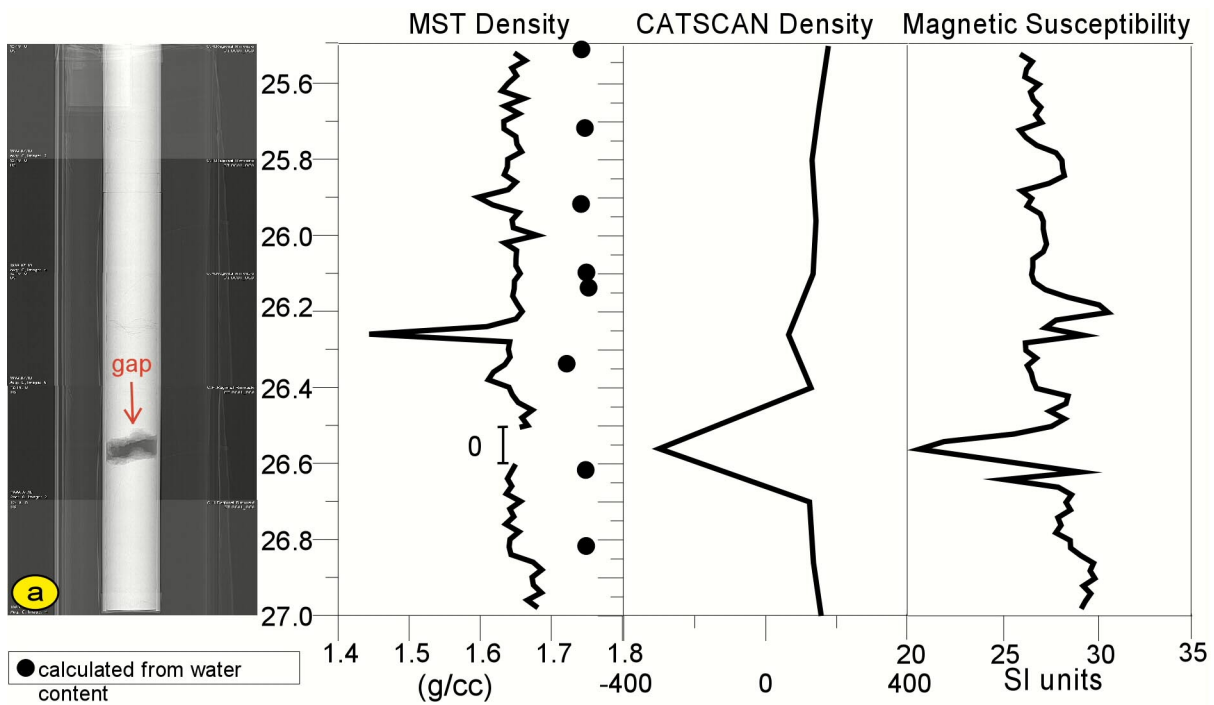


Figure 2. Use of CATSCAN on Marion Dufresne core MD992-12, (depth of 25.5-27.0m).

IMPACT/APPLICATION

Relationships developed in this project show the importance of sediment liquidity index and seabed density profiles in representing the behavior of marine sediment. These values can be used to predict regional slope stability and the rheological behavior of debris flows. General strength-density relationships can be used for modeling sediment accumulation and stability.

TRANSITIONS

Geoacoustic properties are being used by mappers and acousticians to identify lithologies acoustically. Rheological properties are being used by modelers to represent debris flows (Imran et al. 2000). Landslide generation models are being used by landscape evolution modelers. Offshore research groups interested in margin (January 1999 Paris Workshop) and in oil and energy development (September 1999 London Workshop) were used as a platform to present our knowledge on submarine slope stability and hazard acquired as part of STRATAFORM .

RELATED PROJECTS

Lee has developed a USGS project to investigate sediment and pollutant transport on the Los Angeles margin that uses techniques produced by STRATAFORM. Locat is investigating the behavior of a newly formed sediment layer acting as a natural cap over contaminated sediment in Canada. The development of this project benefited from approaches developed within STRATAFORM. Recently, a group of Canadians led by J. Locat, and H. Lee developed a new project with project COSTA (COntinental Slope STAbility) in Europe that will last until 2003.

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